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4/3/2013 - **MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, Ala.** -- "If you work hard, you never know where life will take you," said Capt. Lia Radulovic during a live radio interview for Indonesian talk show "Morning Coffee" recently.

These words held special resonance for Radulovic, a Language Enabled Airman Program participant who was born into poverty in Jakarta 34 years ago. Her hard work led her from Indonesia, through college in the United States and to her current position as an Officer Training School instructor at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.

Radulovic's recent visit to Indonesia marked an important milestone in her life, as she embraced the opportunity "to show the Indonesian people a real-world example of what America's all about," she said.

She returned to Indonesia as part of her participation in LEAP, a career-long language and culture learning program operated by the Air Force Culture and Language Center at Maxwell. Program participants attend online language training as well as Language Intensive Training Events every few years that immerse the participants in the language they study.

For Radulovic, her LEAP training mission was to attend a language school in Jakarta. Soon after she arrived, she began putting her language skills to real-world use, helping the U.S. embassy there with a variety of translation duties.

It wasn't just translation that kept Radulovic busy during her month in Indonesia, however. According to Col. Kevin Booth, the air attaché at the embassy, Radulovic's most important contribution was her inspiring story. When local media outlets learned of Radulovic's heritage and her accomplishments, she became a sought-after interview subject for television and radio.

"The most important work she did here was public outreach to Indonesian youth and women," Booth said. "Her example as an Indonesian-born woman who works her way through the U.S. university system, then joins the United States Air Force and becomes a successful officer and instructor at our OTS is compelling to any audience, but especially to young people here in Indonesia."

Radulovic connected with Indonesian audiences through her personal experiences. She shared the reality of her upbringing, which was sometimes harsh in its austerity.

"I was a little girl, and I had just gotten my first pair of high-heeled shoes. I wore them to school, and I was so proud of them," she said. "On my way walking home from school, it started raining ... It flooded, and I was walking home in water up to my hips, but I held those shoes up above my head so they wouldn't be ruined. As I walked, I looked at the beautiful houses I passed, all behind high gated walls, and I thought, 'I bet those people don't have to walk home barefooted carrying their shoes!'"

Because of her opportunities in the Air Force, which recognizes the valuable contributions different cultures provide, Radulovic said she is able to see both sides of the scene today, while maintaining a foothold in each. As such, she is eager to share her experiences to demonstrate to others who share her background of the possibilities for improving their circumstances. "Now, I live in a 'gated community,'" said Radulovic. "I can show them that the opportunities are boundless."

Opportunity and diversity were recurring themes during Radulovic's media appearances, including a spot on a popular Indonesian talk show "Bukan Empat Mata." Radulovic said that she was not the stereotypical American that many in Indonesia would expect. Being of Javanese ethnicity (the largest ethnic group in Indonesia.), Muslim and female, she said she was a living example of the diversity of the United States.

"We can tell people all day long, but until we show the diversity, it doesn't mean as much," she said.

Having the LEAP participants show, not just tell, the American story was invaluable to the U.S. embassy, according to Booth.

"LEAP is a forward-looking program that invests in our Airmen and our future; we need Airmen who understand other nations and other cultures," he said. "These Airmen will provide the key to successful collaboration and partnerships with nations like Indonesia. Our nation and Air Force must continue to look forward and invest in capabilities that will enhance our ability to work closely with partner nations in the future. LEAP is wise investment, and LEAP Airmen are a key component to future engagement with partner nations."

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